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ABSTRACT

If we adopt an approach to language teaching which is closely based on the learner's specific needs and shortens the period that may elapse between the beginning of language study and the first time the learner can put his newly acquired knowledge into practice, we not only motivate existing learners to work harder and learn more but may also encourage people to begin foreign language learning who would never have considered it before. We can imagine a system which does not only divide up the whole of the language into those parts which are essential for learners of different occupations or with different needs, but which takes any one of those parts and divides it further into parts relevant only for specific operations found on a given job. We must then show how these parts are interrelated and guide the learner to suitable learning sequences, while, at the same time, maximizing his freedom of choice. Included here are a consideration of various hotel staff functions and, in particular, the writing of hotel correspondence and the waiter function. The paper finally focuses on one of the operations that constitute the waiter function, namely the understanding of orders and the vocabulary required for it. (Author)

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"A European units/credits system for
modern language learning by adults"

"THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE NEEDS OF WAITERS AND HOTEL STAFF"

by

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N.B. : The present study contains extracts from a considerably longer study on the same subject which gives more detailed arguments and additional results.

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1. Introduction

In a small hotel, a waiter who knows a foreign language may, at some time or other, be asked to assume any of the functions of other employees if his foreign language skill makes him the most suitable person for a specific job. These functions are many and the kind of foreign language skill that is required varies from function to function. Even among the different operations which the waiter carries out in his central role as a waiter (serving food, etc.) different language needs can be distinguished for different operations.

It is obviously unnecessary for a person to know "the whole language" in order to say and understand the things a waiter usually has to say and understand, i.e. to function successfully as a waiter dealing with foreign guests. If we specify which part of a language is essential for the waiter's work, we help him to acquire more quickly the ability to deal with foreign guests and show him that what he learns is very relevant for his work and can be put into practice immediately. This is not only true of waiters but, mutatis mutandis, also for other learners no matter whether they learn for professional, social or other reasons. If we adopt an approach to language teaching which is thus closely based on the learner's specific needs and shortens the period that may elapse between the beginning of language study and the first time the learner can put his newly acquired knowledge into practice, we not only motivate existing learners to work harder and learn more but may also encourage people to begin foreign language learning who would never have considered it before.

Let us return to the waiter. We can imagine a system which does not only divide up the whole of the language into those parts which are essential for learners of different occupations or with different needs but which takes any one of those parts (e.g. here that are relevant for the waiter) and divide it further into parts relevant only for specific operations of the waiter (e.g. understanding an order, receiving the guests, apologising for delays, etc.). We expect that the increasing number of subdivisions into small parts (called "modules") will increase the effects already described: shorter learning times before practical application, increased relevance and motivation.

Subdivision of language into small parts, however, is not enough. We must then show how these parts are interrelated and to what extent the learning of one part presupposes that another part has previously been learnt; in brief we must guide the learner to suitable learning sequences but, in order to increase his motivation and the relevance of his studies, we must maximise his freedom of choice.

The present study gives examples of such an analysis. It contains extracts from a considerably longer study on the same subject, which

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gives considerably more detailed arguments and additional results. The examples are not perfect and are not worked out in great detail. The point of the present study is to illustrate a certain approach to language learning rather than give specifications which can be put into practice as they stand.

I shall begin by giving a list of functions usually carried out by different employees in the hotel. Any one of these could have been analysed in detail. I have chosen two. One example of each of the more detailed analysis is taken from written (correspondence) and spoken language. The analysis of spoken language deals with the waiter-function. The discussion finally focuses on one of the operations that constitute the waiter-function, namely the understanding of orders and the question of the vocabulary that is required for it.

2. Hotel staff functions

Figure 1 shows the functions of hotel staff who may come into contact with foreign guests. A waiter with knowledge of a foreign language may, in a small hotel, be asked to help with any of these functions - for linguistic or other reasons.

Figure 1: List of hotel staff functions

F1 waiter, serving food; barman/barmaid; room service

F2 receptionist

F3 porter carrying luggage from car in front of hotel to rooms inside

F4 dealing with correspondence

F5 telephonist

F6 giving information about entertainments, shopping facilities, ...

We shall illustrate the arrangement of modules by reference to Functions 1 and 4.

3. Module arrangements for writing hotel correspondence

In many situations it suffices if the foreign letters arriving in the hotel are understood and replies are sent in the native language of the hotel staff. If, however, the hotel language is very uncommon in the country of the recipient (e.g. Russian or Japanese in England), a reply must be sent in the language of the recipient. The following is an example showing how the subject matter that has to be learnt for this purpose can be structured in such a way that it maximises the learner's freedom of choice and brings a pay-off in his work as quickly as possible.

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The learning material consists of words and fixed phrases on the one hand and grammar on the other.

S1 Enough for stating availability of rooms, price and dates.

S2 Additional words and phrases to deal with more complex requests, e.g. descriptions of facilities in rooms, description of hotel; availability of baby-sitters; positions of rooms relative to one another, etc.

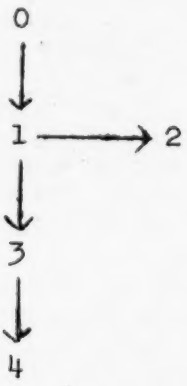
These two sections enable the writer to communicate in a kind of "telegram style", with words and fixed phrases, without the ability of freely forming new grammatical sentences. The ability to form complete sentences (grammar) is taught in Sections 3 and 4:

S3 assertions

S4 questions; ability to elicit more information from potential guest.

Figure 2 shows in which order the sections can be tackled. "a ⟶ b" means "a must precede b". "0" means "begin".

Figure 2



On logical (pedagogical) grounds more freedom could have been given (by postulating 0 → 2 instead of 1 → 2) but I have preferred to simplify the example by only offering choices which are likely to be used.

The three simple orders of Figure 3 are compatible with the partial order of Figure 2. Each of these simple orders shows one possible sequence in which a learner might acquire the total skill of productive correspondence. Additional possibilities arise from the fact that the learner may break off each sequence at any point.

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Figure 3: Simple orders compatible with Figure 2 (read horizontally)

1, 2, 3, 4
1, 3, 2, 4
1, 3, 4, 2

Distinct stages of competence result from the different combinations of skills that are gradually built up from the sequences in Figure 3. The learner who begins with (1, 2) chooses to extend his vocabulary to cope with a wider range of situations, initially at the expense of grammar (and hence aesthetic and logical quality).

The learner who starts with (1, 3, 4) is at the opposite extreme. He learns as much grammar as possible (within the limits of the correspondence task) with a minimum vocabulary. Thus he is able to cope increasingly well with a very small set of situations. Only when, at the very end, he adds Section 2, does he enlarge his range of situations.

The learner who chooses (1, 3, 2, 4) makes a very reasonable compromise (which might well be adopted by someone who writes a simply ordered (i.e. not only partially ordered;(cf Bung 1971) course). The advantage of this compromise is this: the learner of (1, 3, 4, 2) may have little opportunity of using the extra grammatical skill (questions) acquired by Section 4 because, at that stage, he can only apply it to "availability, price and dates", situations in which few queries are necessary. Queries are more likely to arise out of more complex requests, for which he also needs the vocabulary of Section 2. Therefore he cannot fully benefit from Section 4 until he has also mastered Section 2.

The compromise learner who has chosen (1, 3, 2, 4) can fully use all his skills the moment he has acquired them, since Section 2 enables him to deal with more complex situations in the "words-only" mode even before he has acquired Section 4.

The most reasonable choices, then, are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Learning sequences for hotel correspondence

1, 2, 3, 4
1, 3, 2, 4

Both are equally acceptable for different purposes and learners. Thus we remain with Figure 5, the partial order (of the must-precede relation) which is compatible with the two recommended simple orders of Figure 4.

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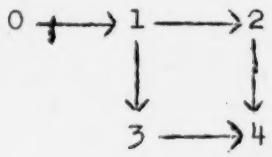
Figure 5: Recommended partial order of must-precede relation in productive correspondence skills



4. Function 1: Analysis of the waiter's operations

Function 1 (serving food, etc. in a restaurant) can be analysed into 18, partly optional, operations (Figure 6).

Figure 6: List of waiter's operations

0 Start of linguistic procedure
1 Refusing to receive guests
2 Receiving guests
3 Response to guests demanding waiter's attention
4 Exploring guests' general wishes
5 Suggesting dishes
6 Explaining what a dish is and how it is made
7 Understanding the order
8 Communicating the order to kitchen staff
9 Response to guests complaining about delays in service
10 Bringing the food and ascertaining who has ordered what
11 Serving the food
12 Response to guests complaining about quality of food
13 Polite enquiry about quality of food
14 Response to guests complaining about quality of food (14 tends to exclude 12, and vice versa)
15 Bringing the bill
16 Justifying charges if queried
17 Taking money, giving change
18 Seeing guests out of the restaurant
19 End of waiter function

The temporal order in which these operations may occur can be represented by a directed graph (Figure 7). The arrows show clearly which of these operations may be by-passed.

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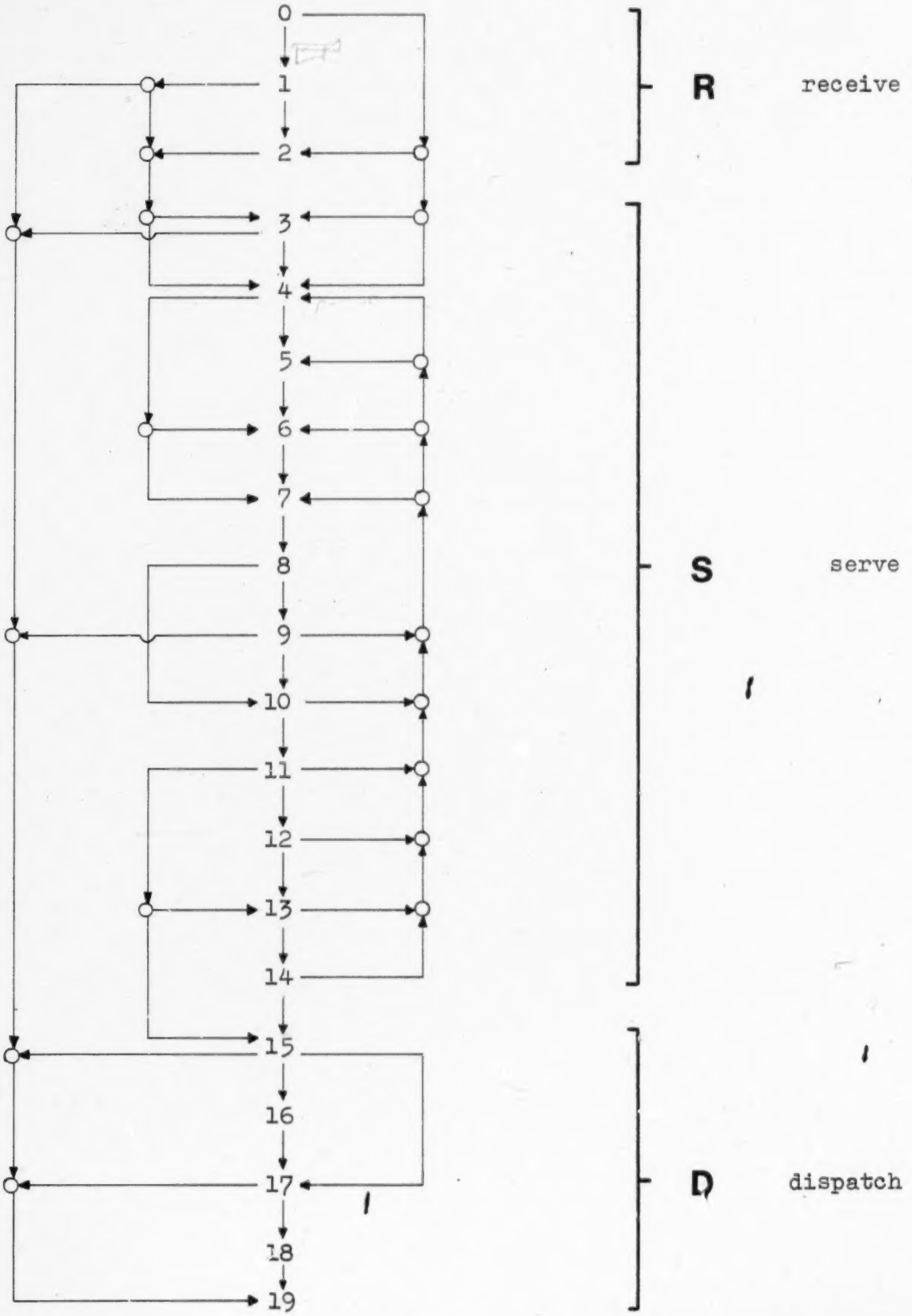
Figure 7: Central waiter function: temporal sequence of operations ('a ⟶ b' = 'b may follow a directly' ; key to numbers: Figure 6)



5. Is language learning worthwhile?

All operations can be triggered off and carried out by non-verbal means (i.e. without either the waiter or the guest using a foreign language). For instance, Op 1 and Op 2 can be performed by brute force or other gestures. Flowcharts with hierarchies of food descriptions (hot/cold, liquid/solid, sweet/piquant; meat-based, egg-based, rice-based, flour-based, etc.) can be used for Ops 4 and 5. Explanatory leaflets or translated menus can be used for Op 6 (I call this a non-verbal operation because handing over a leaflet, regardless of what it contains, is a motor-skill, not a verbal skill). The order (Op 7) can be given by pointing at the translated menu or by writing down numbers referring to it. Op 8 can be handled in the same way.

The fact that set leaflets and translated menus can be used so effectively is due to the fact that the essential utterances can be reduced to an equivalent finite set of utterances ("phrase-book" nature of the skill). For this very reason foreigners survive even without sharing a language with the waiter. It has yet to be demonstrated that learning of phrase-book skill is worthwhile (e.g. in the sense of Frank and Frank-Böhringer 1968) for waiters, that small employers are willing to pay more for waiters who have such a limited skill or will employ them by preference. By "learning" I mean here deliberate learning, with a conscious investment of time and, perhaps, money, as opposed to incidental learning, which is very common among waiters.

All operations (except 11, which is essentially non-verbal) can be carried out by very limited linguistic means or by a range of less restricted linguistic means.

My query about the worthwhileness of learning concerns only the very restricted skills if tackled as an end in themselves (NB: The query does not decide the question one way or the other!). This limited end is often achieved by:

1. Incidental learning on the part of the waiter
2. Non-verbal means
3. Foreign language skill or incidental learning on the part of the guest

On the other hand, there is no doubt that greater linguistic competence (even below T-level) can be a great asset, facilitate and speed up operations, charm or flatter the guests and be of positive commercial value to the restaurant - and thus worth paying for. Our analysis of the more limited skills is worthwhile inasfar as it shows useful stepping stones towards greater mastery.

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6. The ordering of operations

We now have to search for methods which determine in which order the various linguistic skills corresponding to the waiter's operations can, or should, be learnt.

A number of independent criteria offer themselves for consideration, e.g.

1. task size
2. importance of operation
3. temporal priority of job operation (operational must-precede relation)
4. "logical support" of subject matter content (pedagogical must-precede relation).

7. The operational must-precede relation

Figure 8 shows how closely certain operations are linked with one another. "a → b" means "a must precede b directly or indirectly". This is operational precedence (in the restaurant) as opposed to learning precedence. It does not imply that the waiter has to learn first the language of those operations which must come first in the restaurant. The diagram does, however, pin-point the importance of certain operations, namely those without which the guest would never pay. These are the two boxed-in strings of operations. Learning associated with these operations is more important than that associated with the others. The most important of the boxed-in operations are Op 4 (Exploring the guest's general wishes), Op 7 (Understanding the order) and Op 11 (Serving the food). Op 11 is non-verbal and will not be considered any more.

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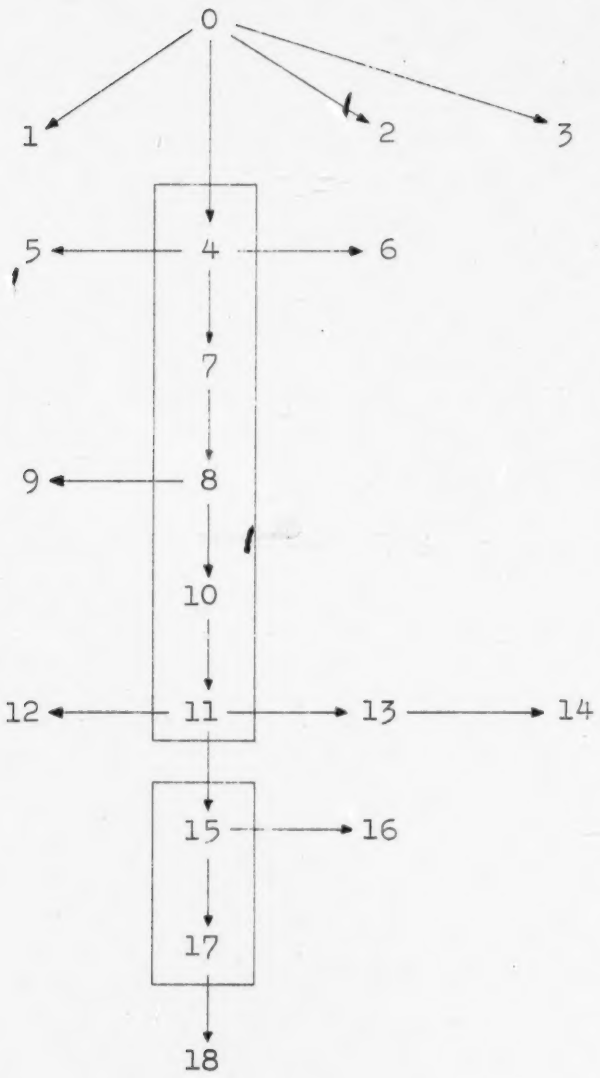
Figure 8



Key to numbers: Figure 6

8. Some vocabulary categories for Operations 4, 7 and 10

Figure 9 shows examples of sets of words and phrases which may be required for Ops 4, 7 and 10.

Figure 9: Vocabulary categories for Ops 4, 7 and 10

Op 4	
receptive	trigger word: waiter
productive	nouns: food, drink
	adjectives: descriptive of food
	fixed phrases: Can I help you?
	What would you like?
	Would you like ...?
Op 7	
receptive	trigger word: waiter
	nouns: food, drink, tobacco, utensils
	adjectives
	numerals up to 20
productive	same as "receptive", for confirmation
Op 10	
productive	nouns: food, drink
	fixed phrases: The ... was for you?

There are certain sequences of learning which bring a quicker pay-off in operational terms and there are others which should definitely be discouraged (if the language is being learnt for utilitarian purposes). On this basis we set up the must-precede relation of Figure 11.

The categories to be ordered in Figure 11 are listed in Figure 10.

As long as the list of adjectives has not yet been established (lack of time prevents me from proposing a list here), our remarks about the position of adjectives in the must-precede relation must be rather general and tentative. It is clear that adjectives can be learnt before nouns but that they cannot usefully function before at least some nouns have been learnt. This fact is reflected in Figure 11.

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Figure 10: Vocabulary categories for Ops 4, 7 and 10

receptive		productive	
1	trigger word: "Waiter!"		
2	food nouns generic	12	food nouns generic
3	food nouns specific	13	food nouns specific
4	drink nouns generic	14	drink nouns generic
5	drink nouns specific	15	drink nouns specific
6	tobacco nouns	16	tobacco nouns
7	utensil nouns generic	17	utensil nouns generic
8	utensil nouns specific	18	utensil nouns specific
9	numerals, 1,.....,20	19	numerals, 1,.....,20
10	adjectives	20	adjectives
11	animal nouns	21	animal nouns
		22	Op 10 fixed phrases
		23	Op 4 fixed phrases

The trigger word, "waiter", is of obvious, vital importance.

While I would prefer to have the generic food nouns learnt before the specific food nouns (if any), a waiter with a clear knowledge of the occurrence probabilities of specific food nouns in his particular hotel may prefer (and benefit more) from learning (some of) the specific food nouns first. Therefore Figure 11 does not establish any priority relation between generic and specific food nouns.

Animal nouns could also be learnt before food nouns but, like adjectives, they could not become useful before at least some generic food nouns ("meat") have been learnt. Further analysis will have to establish for each language, including English, whether the immediate pay-off is greater if the waiter learns generic food nouns plus animal nouns (e.g. "meat of calf") instead of learning more specific food nouns (e.g. "veal").

Tobacco nouns and utensil nouns are less important than food nouns and should therefore, in my preferred order, be learnt after the food nouns. This applies to tobacco nouns because selling tobacco products is not the central business of a restaurant and to the utensil nouns because the waiter can largely avoid such queries by serving the guests with the right utensils to start with. However, I feel that my grounds for establishing priorities are not weighty enough for depriving the waiter of his freedom to choose his own sequence. Hence no priority has been established between food nouns on the one hand and tobacco and utensil nouns on the other.

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The waiter should be able to make do with the numbers up to 20; we assume that he will usually serve parties of less than 20. If there are more than 20 guests ordering jointly he will usually find it easy to extend his number system to 30 by using his creative common sense.

I have not brought any verbs, prepositions, etc. into the subject matter specification of Ops 4, 7, 10 and 11. While they would be required of an articulate waiter at a higher level of competence (but still below T-level), they are much less important than the categories listed and, in the absence of a corpus of "waiter utterances" (which should be procured), they are very difficult to establish in any reasonably objective fashion. John Trim points out how important it is that negations in commands are correctly understood and obeyed.

Figure 11 shows potential learning sequences of the skills listed in Figure 10. "a $\longrightarrow$ b" means "a must precede b" but when several arrows enter b and b has the raised index 1 (e.g. 9^1), the 1 indicates that only one (any one) of the sections immediately preceding (according to the arrows) must be learnt before b may be tackled. Receptive skills appear within circles.

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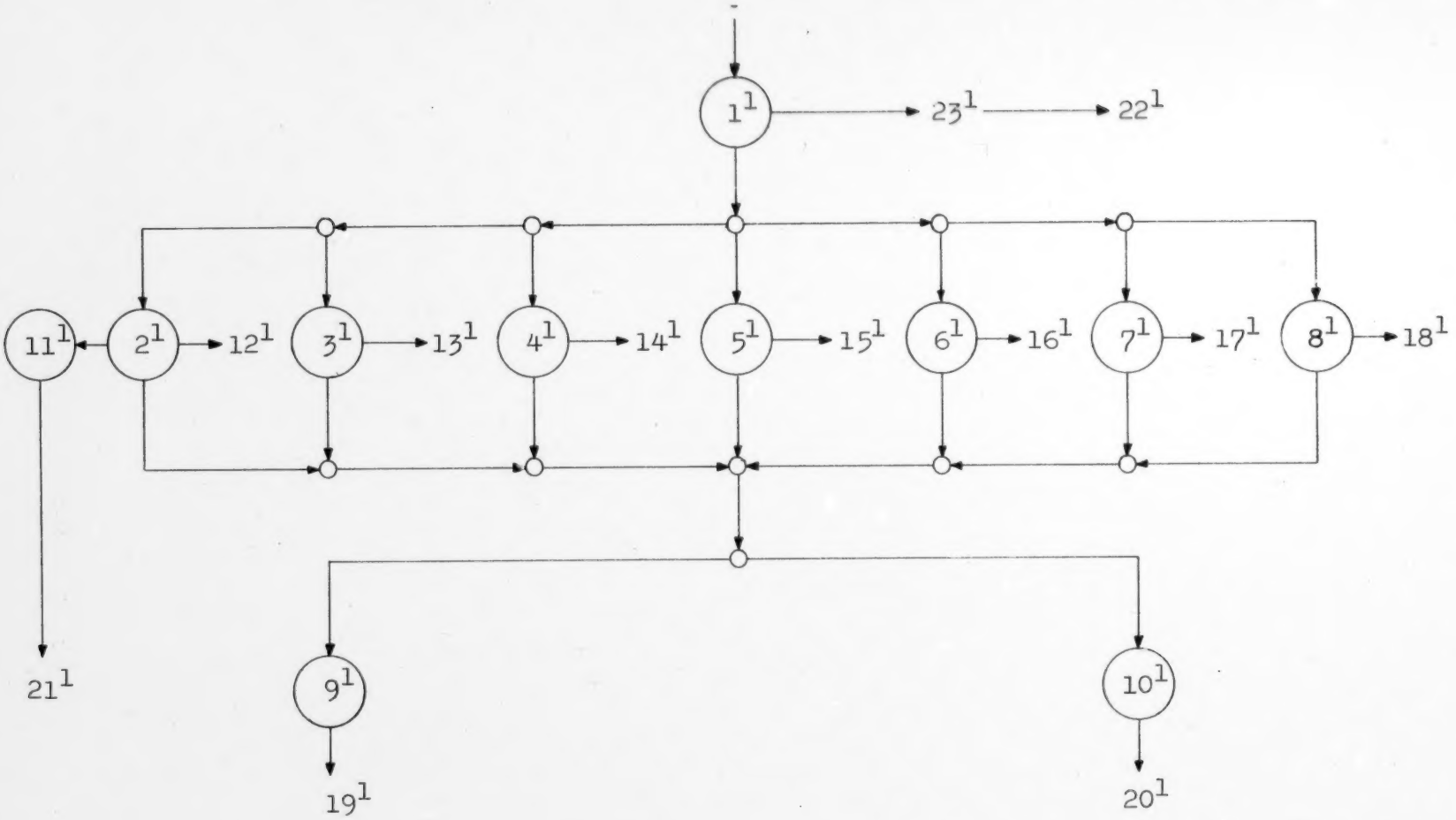
Figure 11: Pedagogical must-precede relation of skills listed in Figure 10
('0' means 'Begin')



9. Potential word lists for Op 7: Understanding an order for food, etc.

In establishing a word list, I have confined myself to nouns denoting food, drink, tobacco and the waiter. I have omitted the utensils (fork, spoon, light (match) etc.) from consideration. I have not tried to propose a definite list of words which should be known to the waiter but confined myself to investigating, in part, the nature and the adequacy of a sample of the existing word lists.

Let us discuss the composition of the word list of Figure 12.

The first column, marked c1, places an "1" against every word that occurs in van Ek's list of nouns IIg, "Shopping and meals" (1972, pp. 24-26).

Food words which are missing in the "Shopping and meals" list but seem relevant for Op 7 can sometimes be found in other parts of van Ek's list. These are "oil" and "water". They are marked "1" in c2 (EE = van Ek elsewhere). It may facilitate future specifications of learning units by certain fairly formal procedures of selection if a revised version of van Ek's specification repeated words which belong to different categories. Thus one could be sure of finding all food words under the heading "Shopping and meals" or "foods". A more economical approach may be the construction of matrices for such classificatory purposes.

Note that van Ek has "orange" and "sweet" as adjectives but not as nouns.

All words which occur anywhere in van Ek, i.e. the union of sets EF and EE, are marked "1" in c7.

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Figure 12: List of nouns relevant for Op 7

EF van Ek food list
EE van Ek elsewhere
BG BASIC general
BI BASIC international
D degree of difficulty
0 very easy, easy or normal
1 difficult
2 very difficult
PS Penguin Spanish
E van Ek anywhere
B BASIC anywhere

	c1 EF	c2 EE	c3 BG	c4 BI	c5 D	c6 PS	c7 E	c8 B
apple	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
bar	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	1
beef	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	1
beer	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
berry	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
bread	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
butter	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
café	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
cake	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
champagne	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
cheese	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
chicken	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
chocolate	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
cigar	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
cigarette	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
cocktail	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
coffee	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
cognac	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
cream	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
cup	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
dessert	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
drink	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1
egg	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
fish	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
food	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
fruit	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
glass	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1

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	c1 EF	c2 EE	c3 BG	c4 BI	c5 D	c6 PS	c7 E	c8 B
ice-cream	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
jelly	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
liqueur	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
macaroni	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
meal	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
milk	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
mineral water	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
nut	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
oil	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
olive	0	0	0	1	2	1	0	1
omelette	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
orange	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
pastry	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
potato	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
restaurant	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	1
rice	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
roll (bread roll)	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
rum	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	1
salad	1	0	0	1	2	1	1	1
salt	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
sandwich	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
sardine	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
soup	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
sugar	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1
sweet	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
tea	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
vanilla	0	0	0	1	2	0	0	1
vegetables	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
vodka	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
waiter	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0
water	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1
whisky	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
wine	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	1

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Here are some examples of dishes not included in van Ek's list: pudding, steak, sherbet (US), hamburger, hot dog, frankfurter, potato crisps, tomatoes, beans, juice, onion, lamb, mutton, pork, beef, jelly, orange, lemon, apple, pear, (fish and) chips.

Van Ek, by omitting these words from his list, asserts implicitly that "common core" learners (e.g. the imaginary tourist) need not know these words in order to "get by" in the foreign country or, at least, that these words are less important or useful than those listed. It is irrelevant here whether this assertion is right or wrong. Let us assume that it is right. Then the technical question arises whether the waiter needs to learn at least some of them in his special-purpose learning unit "in order to get by", i.e. whether there are some words in the system which are placed below T-level for the waiter and above T-level for the common-core learner.

I feel strongly that this should not be done: if a word is placed above T-level for one category of learner, it should be there for all categories of learners. Otherwise the structure of the system will become too complicated.

If the words not listed by van Ek are indeed so very important for the waiter, then they should either be brought into the list covering the area below T-level, or the waiter has the simple remedy of moving up to a learning unit above T-level and acquiring the additional words there, even before tackling other learning units below T-level.

The first alternative is not harmful to common-core learners since even the area below T-level is not to be treated in a monolithic way: there will be partial orders of learning sequences below T-level not only for special-purpose languages but even for common-core learners. Therefore a larger number of words below the fairly arbitrary T-level need not frighten a common-core learner.

The second alternative is also quite reasonable if we can show that the waiter can at least "get by" with the words in van Ek's list and still is distinct from the common-core learner because he acquires only a specific subset from the common-core (at least to start with). We shall attempt to do this now.

It is apparent that van Ek has solved the problem of selecting a comparatively small number of words to gain the widest possible coverage of subject matter area by listing, at least in the food-list, almost exclusively generic terms. Thus we have "fruit" but not "apples" and "pears" or "oranges" and "lemons"; we have "meat" but not "beef" or "steak". Oddly enough, we do have "chicken".

While this approach does not guarantee that things run smoothly in the restaurant (a customer may not wish to eat pork on any account and might therefore have to forgo meat altogether

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if he cannot exclude pork specifically or ask for beef specifically), the generic terms are better than nothing and should certainly have precedence over their more specific constituent terms.

Receptive knowledge of generic terms will, of course, only work if the guests use them (which often they might not). In that case, they have to be induced to use them. For example, a guest orders pork, the waiter does not understand and asks: "What is pork? A fruit, a drink, a dessert, a kind of rice, a kind of egg, a kind of meat?" Apart from linguistic training, the waiter may need some special, non-linguistic training in how to get the maximum amount of information as quickly as possible with the few words he knows.

If the waiter had learnt the specific terms but not the generic terms, he would not be able to operate with "a kind of" so easily: pork is not "a kind of steak" or "a kind of beef".

The "a kind of" approach works provided the list of generic terms is complete. It should then be possible for the waiter to explain any dish on the menu in terms of "a kind of". To test this, I picked up an arbitrary menu (which turned out to be very dull in the range of foods it offered) in the one-star hotel in which I made my observations. It happened to be in four languages (Spanish, English, French, German) and within any one language the dishes were grouped under generic headings: meats, omelettes, rice, pastas and eggs, ices.

Since the menu was translated, the waiter would, in this case, have to outdo the menu in explicitness and accuracy (not easy with only generic terms) or, with respect to the menu, his knowledge of foreign languages would be useless.

Of the generic headings, van Ek does not have "omelettes" (if this is generic, it might be viewed as "a kind of egg" or "a dish made of eggs") and pastas. Spanish menus frequently contain the generic heading "mariscos" (shell fish). The waiter could not explain this as "a kind of" or "a dish made of" by any of van Ek's generic terms. This is one of several instances where the word list is to be determined not only by what is important in the country of the target language but also by what is important in the linguistic setting of the speech act (i.e. what the guests might see and be curious about).

We might anticipate here the waiter's progression beyond T-level in the stages shown in Figure 13, each stage dealing with the same objects (dishes).

Figure 13: Vocabulary required for Op 7 below and above T-level

Below T-level	1 generic terms only (van Ek list): e.g. "kind of meat", "meat dish"
Above T-level	2 description "meat of pig"; colour of dish ...
	3 precise name: e.g. "pork"
	4 attributes: e.g. "hot/cold"; "well-done"; "iced".

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